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Fannie Hunter, 2014

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Damesha Boone: On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, Rose College, and Knowledge Quest, I want to thank you for taking the time to share your story with us today. I'm Damesha Boone.

Rodtavis Miller: And I'm Rodtavis Miller.

Damesha Boone: And I'm honored –

Fannie Hunter: I can't hear a word you're saying.

Damesha Boone: On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom –

Fannie Hunter: I heard that.

Damesha Boone: I'm honored to meet you and learn from your inspirational story. Today's interview will be archived online at Crossroads to Freedom website. Today's date is June 18th, 2014.

Fannie Hunter: I didn't hear that last.

Damesha Boone: Today's date is June 18th, 2014.

Fannie Hunter: Oh, Fannie Labelle Jones Hunter. Now, that's a long name. I grew up in Hernando, Mississippi. Guess what they called me? **Fannaelle**. Now, if you want your name messed up, go to Hernando. They would call you anything they want to call you, and you better answer it.

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So I was Fannaelle until I left Hernando, Mississippi. Okay. I've lived in Memphis in and out since I've been – it was 1937 when I first came in. Then I went to St. Louis and came back, and I went to Detroit and came back. I went to Montreal, Canada, and I come back. I went overseas to in the Bahamas and I came back.

I like to go. I think you can tell that. Okay. I went to Waterloo, Iowa. When I left Memphis, I thought I was going to **Iowa**. It's spelled I-O-W-A. When I got there, I wasn't in Iowa. I was in Iowa. *[Laughs]* Okay. I lived there a few years.

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And then I came back to Memphis. And I was walking down the street and somebody said, “Hey there.” I looked over _____, “Don’t you go to Centenary?” Centenary, in case you don’t know, is a church – a Methodist church on the – and at that time, it was on the corner of Mississippi and Austin. And this man that was yelling at me, “How dare you go to Centenary.” Lived down the street from Centenary, and he had been seeing me going in there.

And I think he was trying to make a pass at me. But anyway, he kept talking about what’s your telephone number, all of that stuff. And finally, he talked me into giving me his telephone number.

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The next thing I knew, he was driving up – riding up in a car that he didn’t own the car; his friend owned the car. And he said something about, “Would you like to go ridin’?” And I said, “Where are you going?” “Oh, just – would you want to go to Maynard, Arkansas or would you go down to Hernando, Mississippi?” And I said, “Well, I don’t care.” So he chose Hernando, Mississippi, which happened to be my birthplace.

I knew everybody in Hernando, Mississippi, but we lived on the west side, and the **white** folks lived on the east side. Downtown was just a square around the courthouse. Yeah, that’s where they were. And when you went downtown, you walked around the courthouse, and there were –

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Stores, different stores lining around the street that surrounding the whole courthouse. Cute. And so when you went downtown, you walked around and you went in whatever store you wanted to go into. And it was a lot of fun.

Okay. I went to school. You didn’t know that, did you?

Damesha Boone: No, ma’am.

Fannie Hunter: [Laughs] Okay. I went to school at – it was – whatever kind of school was it? Public school. It was their – and when I first went to school, they went to something called _____ to something like 12th grade. So I finished 12th grade at that little Hernando School and I came to Memphis. And everybody I met said, “Where are you from?”

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“Where are you from?” Yeah, “Where are you from? You got an accent.” Never heard of that before in my life. But it’s been that way ever since I left Hernando, Mississippi. Everywhere I go, “Where are you from? Sounds like you have an accent. You come from up north?”

I said, “Where is north?” It was really, really fun coming to Memphis. I lived here off and on. I never stay anywhere a long time. I get bored. So I stayed here I think it was – when did I go to St. Louis? I think it was like ’42. And I came back and I went back to Detroit. I came back.

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And I was just spinning around here and there and everywhere. And I heard somebody was broadcasting by an excursion. “What’s an excursion?” They told me, “You get on a ship, and for the fare, you get on, you go to –” where did we go? Oh, anyway, you go down to Pensacola, Florida. Everything expense paid and all that. And they fed you. But when they tell you continental breakfast, don’t expect no ham and eggs and such.

You know what a continental breakfast is?

Damesha Boone: Yes.

Fannie Hunter: A sweet roll, some orange juice. I’m not kidding. Sweet roll, orange juice.

[0:07:00]

And then sometimes, they’ll bring you some fruit. And you might get a donut. That’s your breakfast. Okay. Then if you want like some eggs and such and stuff like that, you got to pay for it. And they said, “Trip with breakfast.” They’re fooling you. They will give you a donut. They will give you an orange, if you would prefer, a banana.

And then they’ll bring you whatever kind of drink you want. Usually, it’s coffee, and I don’t drink coffee. They’ll give you cocoa or something in it to drink, something wet. Okay. So then you go to where the excursion is taking you.

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The first time I went, it was to New Orleans. That's a place you got to go. New Orleans. They have a little of everything. And you walk around. And every time you pass a corner, there's something else they're doing. I love it. And then you went somewhere else and they were doing something else. New Orleans is the place to go because you see things you've never seen before and don't want to see again.

I go there usually about every year or so now that I've found the way there. I have been going ever since I can remember. And I ended up in Alaska; Alaska, where the sun –

[0:09:00]

Where the sun never does go down in the summertime. I had a hard time learning to sleep with the sun. Sun shining and you're trying to sleep. But this world is made so it has **revolutioned** this way and that brings in the day and night. See, one part of the world is turned toward the sun. You have day. Then when it turns over, you have night. And I lived down in the south, and I had normal day and night.

I went to Alaska. I had day all 24 hours. And then I had night. You ought to go there sometime. You're trying to sleep 12:00 PM and there were people walking the street. [*Indiscernible*].

[0:10:00]

They're having their day. You choose when you to go Alaska whether this is going to be day or night. If it's going to be night, you go in your hotel room and pull down them – what do they call the blackouts today – and then you might get some sleep. But you could still hear them walking up and down the street having themselves some fun. Then if you want it to be day, you got out and went.

And then you saw those sleds, big old sled with six of the most – the largest dogs I have ever seen, and they're almost big as a horse. They are dogs. And they were – I think they give them something to grow that big because they have to pull the sleigh, which is your only transportation. That's what you ride in is the ice sleigh.

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What you're traveling on is ice. You don't see any ground. Those dogs are shooting this way. I think they said they go 45 miles an

hour. And you're in there laughing to death because you're enjoying _____. And when the driver of the dogs want them to do something or other, they say, "Mush." And the dog do this, and he said, "Mush," and they do that. I had a time of my life, except I got tired of sleeping in the daytime.

It was summer. The world had turned the other which way the world had turned toward the sun. So almost 24 hours' daylight. Sometimes, you got about a half hour of sleep. If – I'm telling you –

[0:12:00]

To pull those blackout curtains down and sleep in the daytime. So I did that all. I had fun. And then I got bit with the traveling bug. And I went everywhere I could think of. And some places I couldn't even think of. I went to Montreal, Canada. Don't go there to eat. You stay in the south where you can eat.

I grew up in Hernando, Mississippi where they made food that was good to eat. A person coming from Hernando, Mississippi going to Montreal, Canada, take your lunch with you. I went to the hotel and the menu said –

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"Spaghetti with meat." I said, "Oh, good. Anybody loves spaghetti and meat." So I ordered it. They brought me a round plate, flat plate now, with some red soup. What are you laughing about? They were calling that spaghetti with meat. And I guess those little black dots were the meat. Don't eat when you go to Canada. Take your lunch with you, especially if you came from the south, like Hernando, Mississippi.

So I stayed there and someone in my hotel room told me where to go to eat in Montreal. They actually have food in Montreal, but they hide it. And you have to find out where you can go to get it. So someone in the hotel told me

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A place to go where I could get food to eat. So I managed to survive Montreal. I like it. The cleanest place I've ever seen. You didn't see no paper no the ground. You didn't see anything. Everything was so clean. And the people were nice. They were friendly. And they would help you, tell you where to find it if you

didn't know where to find it. But you see, this is the _____. They hide the good food and won't tell you.

You have to find someone that's – you know, where you can go and get some food. But I liked it and I enjoyed it very, very much. So want to ask me some questions?

Damesha Boone: Yes, ma'am.

Fannie Hunter: Now, you'll have to talk loud. You've been whispering at me.

Damesha Boone: Now, I'm going to ask you –

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A few questions about South Memphis.

Fannie Hunter: About Memphis?

Damesha Boone: South Memphis. South Memphis.

Fannie Hunter: South?

Damesha Boone: Yes, ma'am.

Fannie Hunter: Oh. Do you have an accent? That's what they ask me all the time. About the south.

Damesha Boone: About South Memphis.

Fannie Hunter: Oh, about South Memphis. Oh, yes. Thank you. Now, that _____ clear. South Memphis. When I first came to Memphis, I stopped at a place called **East Street**. Ever heard of it? I lived there until I could get away. East Street runs I think north and south. And it runs into Lamar.

I got on Lamar, and _____ Lamar I think is running east and west. Anyway, it doesn't run straight _____ that way.

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I got on Lamar, and I passed a place that says **Bass**. I said I heard of that. So I got off the bus and walked up and that was the luckiest thing I ever did, walking up Bass Street. I passed Mississippi. I passed – where else did I pass when I first got there. You know where it is now, but I mean, I'm trying to visualize what

it was to me when I got off on **Band** Street in Lamar and walking west. And I passed Mississippi, and then it got interstate.

I went on up, I think it was Hernando Street that I had found. And I passed a place that said –

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Gay Hawk. Hey, hey. I got off there. I wanted to see a Gay Hawk that flew. And I found myself into a little drive-in place. They had tables outside and you could go inside and eat. I went inside. It was just like any other café I had ever seen. I went back outside, and I saw some tables sitting around. I went out there, and here comes people to take my order.

They could've taken my order inside. But when you got outside, you get special treatment. They bring your food from the inside to the outside. I loved it. So from then on, Gay Hawk was one of my favorite places. Then I went – I joined a church –

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And the church was named Seminary. There isn't many other churches there. I mean, there's another church in Memphis besides Seminary. I didn't know that. *[Laughs]* Anyway, I've been in Seminary ever – I think it was like 1927. You wasn't born. *[Laughs]* And it's been fun. Like I said, I never found any other church. I've been in Seminary I think it was like '27 – '37. No, it wasn't 20 – it was '37.

And I've been in Seminary – it was a Methodist church. And then they started switching around and changing names and something like that. So I'm in a United Methodist – at least the people –

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That was in Seminary are now United Methodist. I'm still a Methodist. Don't tell them. But *[laughs]* anyway, I enjoyed the church. But anyway, I enjoyed the church. I enjoyed the people that I met in the church. And when they want to laugh, they said, "Get Fannie." I make 'em laugh. But I didn't start out to be a comedian. It just happened.

And when they – things get a little dull, they wanted to liven up, they said go get Fannie. And so I became a comedian, not

officially. But when I want to make people laugh, I can make them laugh. Okay. So is that enough?

[0:20:00]

Rodtavis Miller: Okay. My question is now is how was South Memphis different now than from when it was when you were coming up?

Fannie Hunter: Well, you're whispering again.

Damesha Boone: [Laughs] I'm sorry, ma'am. I was asking you how different is South Memphis from now than it was when you were coming up?

Fannie Hunter: I can see your mouth working.

Damesha Boone: I – I'm sorry.

Fannie Hunter: I ____ '27, however long back it is. I'm 95 years old and I've forgotten a lot of the things. But as far as I can see, style changed. People dressed different if that's what you mean. Let me tell you ____ of what I used to wear and love. I can't think of it now.

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But it changed names several times. They were pants that came down to your knee and some of them stopped up here. You know – you wouldn't know what I was talking about. You're too young. Pedal pushers. You ever heard that?

Damesha Boone: Yes, ma'am?

Fannie Hunter: Oh, you heard of peddle pusher?

Damesha Boone: Yes, ma'am.

Fannie Hunter: We were wearing pedal pushers. We were wearing penny loafers. You ever heard of that?

Damesha Boone: Yes, ma'am.

Fannie Hunter: What are they?

Damesha Boone: They're like some shoes or whatever. Now, they're like pants but –

Fannie Hunter: Penny loafers?

Damesha Boone: Can you tell me what they is?

Fannie Hunter: Talk –

Damesha Boone: Can you tell me what they are? Penny – are they cute?

Rodtavis Miller: She was asking could you tell her what they were.

Fannie Hunter: How you wore the pedal pushers?

Rodtavis Miller: No, ma'am. She was asking –

Fannie Hunter: You don't know what pedal pushers were?

[0:22:00]

Damesha Boone: No, ma'am. I thought I knew but I don't. No.

Fannie Hunter: Okay. I'm trying to think of what they call them now if they – you know you wear the same kind of clothes, but from a few years, they change names. I think – I think – what are they called now? It's the same thing, but there's a different name now. Some kind of shorts. Bermuda shorts. Do you know what a Bermuda short is?

Damesha Boone: Yes, ma'am.

Fannie Hunter: Are you saying yes? Bermuda shorts were called pedal pushers. It's the same thing. It's pants that come down to here.

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When I was coming on, those were pedal pushers because people rode bikes. And you got – do you know what a bike is?

Damesha Boone: Yes, ma'am.

Fannie Hunter: What is a bike?

Damesha Boone: [Laughs] A bike is a type of transportation.

Fannie Hunter: Well, bikes used to be called bicycles. Did you know that?

Damesha Boone: Yes, ma'am.

Fannie Hunter: It was called bicycle, meaning two wheels.

Damesha Boone: Is there anything you would like to add on that we haven't covered? Is there anything you want to add on that we haven't covered?

Fannie Hunter: Oh, do I want to add anything? I – right now, I can't think of anything. What you want to find out –

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Is what you want to know about it. I can't think what you want to know. So you ask the question. I'm trying to think of something we might've been doing back there 90-something years ago that they are not doing now. I can't – no. I know we – what year was it – have you heard of Boogie-woogie? Oh, I got it. [Laughter] We did a dance called the Boogie-woogie.

I think I'll show it to you. [Laughs]

Damesha Boone: I think that's all we can –

Fannie Hunter: You do it – you do it with me.

Damesha Boone: Yes, ma'am.

[0:25:00]

Damesha Boone: Is there any advice you would like to give the young people of South Memphis?

Fannie Hunter: You mean you take advice?

Damesha Boone: Yes, ma'am.

Fannie Hunter: I think what I would want to tell people, you're college students; be yourself. Don't try to copy what somebody else is doing. If you want to do it, do it. If you don't, I don't care how many people are doing it, don't do it. Be yourself. Know yourself.

Know what you want. And I don't care how many other people are doing something you don't want to do. Don't do it. Okay? If there's something you want to do and nobody else doing it, do it anyway. Be yourself. Your creator endowed you with a mind. And if you were supposed to do what everybody else was doing, he would only have made one mind –

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And one person and everybody had to come to ____, “What am I to do now?” He made you an individual with a mind. I can see in your eyes, _____. You have a mind. Follow your own mind. It’s the only advice I can give anybody. Do what you want to do and know what you want to do.

Don’t let somebody talk you into, “Well, this is what’s happening now.” If it isn’t what you want to do, it’s not happening with you. Okay? Be yourself. Only advice I can give anybody breathing. You do what you want to do, not what your friend tell you to do. Be yourself.

Damesha Boone: Thank you for participating in the Crossroads Freedom Project.

Fannie Hunter: Thank you for asking me. I feel so privileged.

[0:27:00]

I don’t know who –

[0:27:02 *End of Audio*]